# [S. P. Merry]

500 Words

Mrs. C. May Cohea

Amarillo, Texas

District #16 PANHANDLE PIONEERS

Related by S. P. Merry

609 Washington Street

Amarillo, Texas

Mr. Merry on June 11, 1883, came to Mobeetie, the "capital of the Panhandle", as he designated it. Later, he worked for the Diamond F Ranch, the Powo, and the T-Anchor, not as a regular cowboy, but as a fence rider or odd-chore man. When the railroad was surveying a route through tho Panhandle towards Las Vegas, New Mexico, he drove a water wagon which the rail officials hired from the Diamond F, for whom Mr. Merry was working at the time. When the surveying party reached the sand hills of New Mexico, he returned to the Diamond F with the wagon, which was no longer needed.

Mr. Merry worked for the T-Anchor ranch under the management of John Hudson, an Englishman who had received his cattle training at the stockyards of the north and in Canada. Mr. Hudson, with the knowledge of the work of hounds in the English countryside, brought a number of them to the plains to rid the ranch of wolves which were making inroads on the cattle. These hounds often followed him to town in the manner of an English country squire.

A man named Poston. a friend of Mr. Merry, was placed in charge of the dogs. The cow hand thoroughly disliked playing nursemaid to a pack of hounds. Once, tiring of the arduous duty, he left for town, (Canyon) feeling the need of a little something to sustain his morale. Before departing, Boston chained several of the animals, perhaps thinking that the others would "hang around" and not be unaccounted for upon his return. His spree, binge, or high lonesome, lasted for several days. Upon returning to his charges, he found that wolves had devoured the chained hounds, which could not defend themselves as well as the free animals. Houston, asked what he was going to say when he made his report to the manager, spat disdainfully and drawled, "Anyway, I've done something better than catch wolves. I have got rid of some of them dogs". [???]

2

Mr. Merry, whose work often found him camping in the Palo Duro, seeing that nesters and others did not denude the range of its canyon cedars for posts and building purposes, riding fence, and performing other outside duties on the T-Anchor range, had numerous encounters with wolves and bears, which were plentiful in the canyon at the time. The big lobo, or "loafer" wolf was canny and hard to catch. The ranch had a bounty of \$10 on a lobo scalp and also maintained the hounds to help in exterminating the wolves and coyotes of the canyons. One day, riding the rim of the canyon, he saw a mother wolf with several pups ambling along the precarious wall beneath him. His approach alarmed the old wolf and she quickly sped into the distance, before he could have shot her, even if he had had a gun with him. "He had left the only gun which he and his brother owned in common at camp, since his brother wished to use it to kill a panther that had been prowling in the vicinity. Dismounting, he picked up rocks from the canyon rim and attempted to kill the lobo pups. The little wolves looked up at him with quick, bright eyes, dodging the rocks neatly at each throw. A stone dislodged accidentally from the rim fell upon the head of one of the little fellows and he ran whining with pain into a small opening in the canyon wall, the others following him into the shelter. After the pups had gone into the hole, Mr. Merry climbed down to the spot and filled the opening with dirt and stones

to keep them safe until he could go to camp and bring back a wagon to take them to the ranch headquarters. Returning with the wagon and team, he cut an eight-foot ceder pole, about as thick as his wrist at the larger end and attached it to a shovel which he bent in the shape of a hoe. With this contraption he raked away the obstructing dirt and twisted the little wolves out of their hiding place. The opening was too small for him to enter, but be did crawl part of the way into the 20-foot deep aperture to get the last of the 14 pups, one of which got away later. He took the wolves to Hudson and asked for the bounty on the 13 scalps. The manager paid half the bounty and asked Mr. Merry to wait for the other half, saying that he could not 3 afford to pay so much for scalps when he was maintaining a large pack of hounds for the purpose.

Mr. Merry and Mr. Poston were out working in the canyon one day when they sighted a beer. The latter refused to go nearer the animal and Mr. Merry borrowed the other's gun to follow the bear and kill it. He had not gone very far when he heard a shout and his companion indicated that he wished to go with him. The bear ran to shelter in a thicket and Mr. Merry let his companion shoot it, since he seemed to want to do so after recovering from his "bear ague".

At another time Mr. Merry, alone at the time, killed a bear which he discovered on an op osite canyon wall. He fired, wounding the bear, seemingly breaking its back or paralyzing it. Having finally despatched the animal, he had great difficulty in loading it upon his horse, which objected to the scent of the bear. At camp that night he prepared bear steaks for him and his partner, who at first refused to eat the stuff. He took a bite to taste the steak and liked it so well that he ate his whole portion. Later, while Mr. Merry was at town, Poston, prepared a bear steak for himself and Merry but reported to the latter that he had devoured both his own and the other's share before Merry returned.

Bears were not the only things to fear in the Panhandle at that time. When the Indians scare of 1891 developed, people in the region were not surprised, for the Indians had been wandering at various times upon the plains from their reservation and were always

threatening to cross the plains on their way to their old grounds in Mexico. The night of the day upon which the rumor was heard there was a dance at Canyon. The people danced on, intent upon having their pleasure at all costs. Men and women came into town for protection. A man who ran a store asked Mr. Merry to keep it for him while he took his family to town for safety. Men threw up breastworks about the little frame courthouse which occupied the center of the town square for defense from the Indians who never came. When the stage driver with the mail arrived from Amarillo, he was asked about the truth / of the report. He 4 verified the rumor and added gruesome details to spice the tale. He told the townspeople how two rangers bad been attacked near Claude, Red Murphy, one of the two, had had his fingers shot off of one hand. With such refinement of detail, the citizens of Canyon could not refuse to believe the report. When the people found out that they had been spoofed, they lay in wait for the return of the stage and its driver, who was working for Clisbee, who held the mail contract. The driver, anticipating the retaliation on which he might expect from the Canyonites, got "stage" fright and had someone else to make the return trip for him.

Mr. Merry was working for the T-Anchor when the cowboy strike of 1883 was in progress. A few of the men on the ranch joined the strikers, the manager telling all those who wished to go to work at the former wage to stay on and those who did not to go. Mr. Merry's nephew was in the strike, later going to New Mexico. A blacksmith shop about a hundred yards south of the T-Anchor headquart rs was mined in anticipation of attack by the striking cowboys. A bomb of scrap iron was placed in the shop, beneath the dirt floor with a keg of gunpowder under it and a fuse leading to the headquarters building. Mr. Merry recalls that when he came to the ranch the main bu lding had only one room completed, the second being in the course of construction. A cook shack was nearby, made of picketts with log and sod roof.

Mr. Merry recalls that duststorms were not general over theplains in those days, although winds were terrific then as now. Dust was so etimes stirred up from ploughed fields after the settlers came, but sandstorms were not as heavy and lasted a shorter time than

now. He was overtaken by one on his return trip with the water-wagon from New Mexico. Observing a low black cloud in the north, he expected to be caught in a terrible storm or tornado, but it was only a duster, which did not last very long.

A tornado near Canyon in the early days blew down barns, and haystacks and lifted big mules up and set them down 75 or a hundred yards distant from their corrals. Another tornado, contrary to the usual idea of such storms, failed to jump the Palo 5 Duro Canyon, but went down the walls, uprooting tress on the canyon side. Still another wind storm from the southeast blew up against the canyon rim, throwing huge stones and rocks into the air.

When Mr. Merry visited in Amarillo in the early '90's, there were about 15 rangers quartered in their barracks near the old Rock Barn. They were here "to keep the sheriff out of mischief". Jim Gober, then the youngest sheriff in the United States, was drinking too much and feeling his liquor - or his importance."

Rangers leaving Amarillo for duty elsewhere killed their negro cook near Runningwater Draw, claiming self-defense, saying that they had told the cook to either return or go with them (Mr. Merry was not sure which) and he had been ugly about it, refusing to do their bidding and offering resistance. Mr. Merry and Mr. T. D. Hobart saw the grave soon after it was made, when he was accompanying the latter to see about buying some land in that vicinity.